

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

September 23, 2011

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Secretary Clinton Launches New Counterterrorism Partnership

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — With the goal of preventing the creation of more victims of terrorism, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton joined foreign ministers from 30 countries in launching the Global Counterterrorism Forum, designed to provide a venue for countries to collaborate on strengthening the capacities of governments, civil society groups and others to prevent and address terrorist threats.

Clinton was joined by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York September 22. She said that with advances in technology, communications and travel, terrorism's targeting of innocent civilians has become a threat to everyone around the world.

"No country can afford to sit on the sidelines in the face of this threat, and no country can afford to go it alone," Clinton said.

The countries launching the forum are in agreement that the international community needs "a dedicated global venue to regularly convene key counterterrorism policymakers and practitioners from around the world — a place to identify essential priorities, devise solutions and chart a path to implementation," she said.

Each country has its own expertise to contribute to the forum, the secretary said. Although circumstances vary from place to place, there is much that countries can learn from each other.

"Our work here has the potential to have a double impact: improving the coordination of counterterrorism efforts across borders and between regions, and also helping countries address terrorist threats within their own borders," she said.

The forum can help frontline states that face the most acute terror threats to develop justice systems that are rooted in the rule of law and respect universal human rights while remaining effective against violent extremism, she said.

It can also deepen the understanding of how individuals become radicalized and are recruited into terror organizations, allowing countries to disrupt those efforts and deny support for violent activities. Clinton said it can help improve coordination and build "new working-level partnerships between our law enforcement, intelligence, customs and judiciary officials who deal with these problems on the ground every day."

The launch of the forum "is just the beginning," she said. Its success "depends on the willingness of all of us, the members, to step up and engage."

"We don't need another debating society. We need a catalyst for action," Clinton said.

FORUM'S "REAL ACTION" IN WORKING GROUPS

A senior State Department official who asked not to be identified told reporters September 21 that the forum brings together wealthy donor nations, Muslim-majority nations, emerging powers such as China and India, and representatives from South America and Africa. He said "the real action" of the forum will take place in its working groups.

Five working groups have been created, the official said. Two are functional — one concerning the criminal justice sector and the rule of law, and the other on countering violent extremism. Three regional groups are dedicated to building counterterrorism capacity in the African regions of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa and in Southeast Asia.

The official said these are regions where there are already existing networks of collaboration against terrorism and efforts under way to strengthen the rule of law and combat extremist ideology.

"It's places like that where I think you can put points on the board early, and we want to get some real momentum behind this organization," the official said.

The official added that countries in North Africa and the Middle East that are transitioning from restrictive emergency laws toward greater freedom are the ones who will be "particular beneficiaries" of the forum's work, because the repressive tactics of former regimes "were, in fact, drivers of radicalization and contributed to the problems we face today."

The official said the Obama administration is expected to announce that it is giving between \$75 million and \$100 million to countries that are working to strengthen the rule of law.

The funds will help ensure that "their police are properly trained to deal with counterterrorism ... their prosecutors know how to bring cases against terrorists ... their judges can handle terrorism cases ... their legislators can write the necessary legislation so that they have what they need to deal with this in their judicial system." The money will also fund rehabilitation programs and improve prisons so former inmates will be separated from extremist organizations.

In addition, the official said, the forum intends to

establish a Global Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism that will provide countries with “the training they need to do their own programs at home and configure their own policies, so that as they fight terrorism they’re not creating more extremists along the way.”

The Abu Dhabi-based center will train community leaders and nongovernmental organizations as well as government officials. The official said it is expected to open its doors in 2012.

U.S. Defense Secretary Says Taliban Insurgents Being Turned Back

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — As the United States ends military operations in Iraq this year, more attention and resources are being focused on the mission in Afghanistan, U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told a Senate committee September 22.

“The core goal of President Obama’s strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan is to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaida, to deny it safe haven in the region and to prevent it from again attacking the United States and our allies,” Panetta said in prepared testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

In late 2001, U.S. military forces quickly toppled the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and drove al-Qaida’s leadership out of the country. But in the years following, the U.S. military shifted focus and resources to Iraq and the Taliban insurgency regrouped and threatened to bring down Afghanistan’s legitimate government, Panetta said.

Under President Obama’s strategy, Panetta said, the effort in Afghanistan has the resources and forces that have helped to put Afghans “on a path to assume lead responsibility for security nationwide by the end of 2014.”

“The insurgency has been turned back in much of the country, including its heartland in the south, and Afghan National Security Forces are increasingly strong and capable,” Panetta testified.

“This undeniable progress allowed us to begin transitioning to Afghan security control in seven areas of the country in July,” Panetta added. Nearly 25 percent of the Afghan population lives in areas where Afghan forces now have the lead responsibility for security.

Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, also testifying at the Senate hearing, said that, from a military perspective, the security situation in Afghanistan is steadily improving. He said Afghan forces and the International Security Assistance Force troops

have wrested the initiative and momentum from the Taliban in several key areas of the country and have forced them out of critical population centers, particularly in the south and southwest.

“Our combined forces are placing sustained pressure on insurgent groups,” Mullen said. “As a result, the number of insurgent-initiated attacks has for several months been lower than it was at the same time last year.”

The United States has begun a drawdown of the surge forces it sent to Afghanistan more than a year ago with July’s return of two U.S. Army National Guard battalions, Panetta said. Through the remainder of this year, a total of 10,000 troops will redeploy, and another 23,000 troops will return to the United States by the end of summer 2012, the secretary said.

Panetta told senators that the reduction of 33,000 U.S. personnel takes place as more than 50,000 new personnel are being added to the Afghan National Security Forces. “That means by the time we have finished drawing down our surge forces, the insurgents will face more forces than they did during this summer’s fighting season — and substantially more of those forces will be Afghan,” Panetta said.

While the growth in the credibility and capabilities of the Afghan forces is allowing for the transition to continue, another component is the long-term U.S. commitment to Afghanistan’s security and stability, Panetta testified. The United States is working with the Afghan government to develop a strategic partnership declaration, which is a framework of mutual commitments that “will help focus the sovereign efforts Afghanistan will take in the years ahead to develop its government, expand its economy and improve its security,” he said.

Panetta said that because of Iraq’s strategic importance in the Middle East, it is in the American national interest that Iraq emerges as a U.S. strategic partner. “Our broader goal moving forward is to build an enduring partnership with the sovereign Iraqi government,” he added.

Panetta told senators that there are fewer than 50,000 U.S. military forces remaining in Iraq, and based on a November 2008 security agreement between the United States and Iraq, the remaining forces will leave by the end of this year. It remains to be determined if a future training agreement will be developed, depending on what action the Iraqi leadership takes, he said.

“Iraq no longer needs large numbers of U.S. forces to maintain internal stability,” he testified.

Citizen Groups Build Trust Among Citizens, Governments

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer

Washington — Citizen groups in countries undergoing political change can encourage government transparency and advance human rights, says democracy specialist Eric Bjornlund.

“That helps build trust among both citizens and government,” Bjornlund told a group of civil society activists gathered September 19 at the U.S. Embassy in Tunis by means of a live video conference from the State Department in Washington. Bjornlund is president of Democracy International, a Maryland-based company that works worldwide to support citizen participation in building democratic societies.

“Politics are for the people, not about how elites try to control public resources,” Bjornlund said. “People need to learn that the political process is something they own. Citizen participation in a country’s change in government can protect the legitimacy of the transition.”

In January, a citizen-led street campaign for political change in Tunisia led to the ouster of the authoritarian president, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, who had ruled for 23 years. Bjornlund said that Tunisians “bent the arc of history” with their activism for change and sparked what came to be known as the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa.

“People around the world are looking to [Tunisia’s] transition to make sure it succeeds,” he said.

Bjornlund, the author of *Beyond Free and Fair: Monitoring Elections and Building Democracy*, described civil society as people who voluntarily join groups “separate from government, family or clan.” The groups range from nongovernmental organizations that provide social services to religious groups, labor unions, business associations and research institutions. They include informal gatherings of friends interested in changing how their governments work.

Pro-democracy groups, Bjornlund said, focus on educating people about democracy and their rights as citizens, monitoring elections and advocating for political change. “We need a new paradigm — to stress politics as a way to improve peoples’ lives,” he said.

CIVIC EDUCATION

Bjornlund said one way civil society organizes is around civic education: helping people gain the skills necessary to effectively participate in politics. Through civic education efforts, citizens can learn how their government functions,

as well as how to analyze and take positions on issues. They can then attend meetings about issues, contribute time or money to a campaign and vote.

Civic education can encourage democratic values such as political tolerance, respect for the rule of law and willingness to listen to people with different views. Another role of civil society is to advocate for the rights of everyone, including youth, women and disenfranchised minorities.

Bjornlund cited the example of the National Citizens’ Movement for Free Elections in the Philippines in the mid-1980s following the assassination of popular Philippines opposition leader Benigno Aquino. The movement exposed electoral fraud and organized the first nonpartisan election monitoring in the country. It became a model for dozens of organizations spread throughout Latin America, Eastern and Central Europe, Africa and South and Southeast Asia, he said.

Bjornlund also talked about citizen involvement in Albania. In 2003, an Albanian citizen movement, Mjaft, or “Enough,” worked to raise public awareness about government corruption. It set values for the country that include equal opportunities for all, respect for debate and active citizenship. The movement now has branches in 18 cities that serve as local government “watchdogs” and use civic lobbying to advocate for change.

Bjornlund said that new ways to communicate, such as social media, have helped raise people’s interest in learning about democracy.

Private Sector Joins USAID in Improving Food Security in Africa

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — The chickpea might be the key to greater agricultural production and improved food security in Ethiopia. A plan to increase chickpea production is being developed to that end by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the PepsiCo Foundation.

Enterprise EthioPEA debuted at the Clinton Global Initiative meeting in New York City, an event organized by former President Bill Clinton to apply new energies and ideas to development problems. The plan will support the Ethiopian government’s effort to develop agriculture in three respects:

- Boost Ethiopian chickpea production by putting advanced agricultural and irrigation practices in the hands of 10,000 Ethiopian farmers.
- Develop and distribute chickpeas as a protein-rich

supplementary food, reaching 40,000 Ethiopian children less than 2 years old.

- Improve the supply chain to increase availability of chickpeas for both Ethiopian and international consumers.

Ethiopia is already Africa's largest producer of chickpeas, but the partnership announcement says great potential exists to increase yields and improve quality. The high protein food is a good meat alternative, sustainably produced, so consuming chickpeas may reduce an individuals' risk of coronary artery disease and diabetes.

Chickpeas, widely cultivated in central Asia and the Mediterranean nations, are also known as garbanzo beans.

"This unique partnership illustrates how we can develop market-based solutions and leverage resources to make a sustainable impact in reducing hunger and poverty, which is particularly critical in light of the crisis in the Horn of Africa," said Dr. Rajiv Shah, USAID's administrator. "In addressing both immediate hunger needs and supporting opportunities for smallholder farmers to boost their earning potential through increased productivity, it will advance the objectives of Feed the Future, the U.S. global hunger and food security initiative."

The Obama administration's Feed the Future campaign provides long-term development assistance to populations living in places frequently stricken with challenging ecological or atmospheric circumstances. The plan aspires to increase the accessibility of staple foods, improve trade and transport routes and harness science and technology to assist populations in surviving difficult events and reducing the probability that adverse events will plunge entire populations into calamity.

PepsiCo's investment in Enterprise EthioPEA is part of a global strategy to make the company a leader in sustainable agriculture.

"We are pleased to be combining powerful local networks, proven experience in development assistance and strong industry expertise to help create new domestic and export food markets," said Indra Nooyi, chairman and chief executive officer of PepsiCo. "This initiative will positively impact the livelihood of local farmers, address the critical issue of famine in the Horn of Africa and create sustainable business opportunities for PepsiCo."

FOOD AND PARTNERSHIP

Three American companies will be sending life-saving therapeutic food to thousands of undernourished children

in the Horn of Africa after having landed contracts to do so from USAID. The peanut-based paste is a specially developed food product used to treat children with severe malnutrition in a six-week treatment regimen.

The amount of "ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF)" set for shipment to Africa will provide enough of this high-nutrient foodstuff to bring almost 130,000 children back from the brink of starvation, according to USAID.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture was involved in the deal, identifying the companies that could produce the special RUTFs, containing milk, oil, sugar, vitamins and minerals to rehabilitate children on the brink of starvation.

"Thanks to America's peanut producers and the American people, this purchase is helping to support U.S. jobs and getting a highly nutritious food product to severely malnourished children in the Horn of Africa," said U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "Our efforts to support food security are critically important to contributing to a more stable world. USDA remains committed to addressing the root causes of food insecurity through sustainable agriculture production and improved agricultural research, and working with our public and private sector partners to provide emergency food assistance when needed."

In 2007, the U.S. peanut industry launched Peanut Butter for the Hungry, a humanitarian initiative to support the development of nutrient-rich and therapeutic foods for severely malnourished children around the world.

"Knowing that the U.S. peanut industry has made this commitment to the children and families in regions in need is deeply satisfying," said George Birdsong, chairman of the American Peanut Council's committee on hunger. "We are honored to have even a small role in helping to save lives."

The United States has committed more than \$600 million to address humanitarian problems in the Horn of Africa and is the largest single donor contributing to the international effort to provide relief.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)